

# THE MEASURE

## A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by Elizabeth Shaw Montgomery, Donald  
Davidson, George O'Neil, Kathryn White Ryan,  
Elizabeth Coatsworth, Maxwell Anderson — — —

Elf-Man, by Joseph Auslander — — — — —

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# The Measure

*A Journal of Poetry*

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## Invictus

GO with the pack, wallow with the herd  
In mockery of peace; leave soul unstirred  
By soft breath of fire:  
Let ecstasy be drowned in blind morass  
Of darkness till vision is gone; so pass  
Slow shadows doomed to blackened pyre.

If this should be your goal, follow the thread,  
Unwind the ultimate length, but I am led  
By one unknown to fairer things:  
Let each man weave his dream, let each man find  
His special star, but never shall you bind  
My wings!

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## These Wings

THEY reach great wings of flame across my road—  
These guardian trees; on some gleam cloth of gold  
Or molten bronze. The brilliant valleys hold  
Aloft their tapestries, as though there glowed  
Vast trays of jewels. The orchards bend beneath  
The weight of fruit, luscious and dark. Here swing  
Two robins, there some swallows dart and sing  
Through resinous air, incapable of death.

Such beauty in the world! But in my heart  
Only the brittle or the rotting husk,  
The shriveled fruit, the leaves turned black with frost.  
So much of beauty . . . Yet these wings impart  
The sense of padlocked gates: here in the dusk  
I wander—exiled, desolate and lost.

*Elizabeth Shaw Montgomery*

## Verity

I DID not do the thing you say I did,  
But I would never trust you with the truth,  
It is a pearl imperiously hid,  
And you are not Naomi to my Ruth . . .  
I would not cast my heart upon the gravel  
For Chanticleer to peck at—barn-yard vandal—  
Nor wear it on my sleeve for daws to ravel  
Its silken truth into the fringe of scandal.

I have used words as pearls upon a thread,  
And not as turning wheels upon the cobbles;  
Mine is the rhythmic language of the dead,  
And all their half the town weeps for my troubles . . .  
The other half goes jangling with a bell  
To be street-crier of my heaven and hell.

*Isabel Fiske Conant*

## Earthy

"I LOVE the earth," the gardener said—  
"To get my hands deep into the ground  
When spring and growing buds come round  
And things push upward from the dead."

The man was slight and rather tall,  
With stubby fingers, black and rough,  
And though he talked the garden stuff  
His hands sought women most of all.

*Prescott Hoard*

## The Princess Imprisoned in a Word

SHE has an unreal look, this tender  
Princess coming down  
A flight of fluted stairs, wearing  
A cucumber-colored gown.

Her hands are pale as curdled clouds,  
Her face is wan as wool,  
And in the bent, uncertain light  
Her walk is beautiful.

*Harold Raymond Ross*

## Nun

NUN, have you ever loved? Not the love of Christ. The sinful love of man. And have you forgotten? You look very calm and very thoughtful. Have you found peace in prayer, or is the sullen silhouette of some flushed hour cold and black in your heart?

Nun, tell me the secret of quiet for the soul. Tell me if at dawn the preliminary radiance gives new hope to a troubled mind. Tell me if the flickering and taciturn light of a candle is the life of that God you adore.

Nun, I kiss your stainless brow with my mind, and beg you pray for me.

*Giuseppe Cautela*

## Spoken at a Castle Gate

**B**EFORE you touch the bolt that locks this gate  
Be warned. There's no return where you are going.  
A sword is tinder at the touch of fate  
And crumbles in a way beyond your knowing.

Something I've heard, but something less I tell.  
An old man knows, advises,—young men smile,  
Blow slug-horns, chink a latch, or clank a bell.  
I've watched a many a one this weary while.

You can hear the nightingales, I won't deny.  
They always sing for eager souls like you,  
Perched on their boughs of possibility,  
Most vaguely heard and still more vaguely true.

Gardens there are, and Queens, no doubt, a-walking,  
White blooms adrift on gold and marvellous hair.  
Young men in murmurous dreams have heard them talking,  
Leaped up like you, and entered . . . vanished . . . where?

For all I know, the castle's just a dream,  
A shadow piled to mask a dangerous ledge,  
A fantasy blown from devils' lungs in steam,  
Made permanent here, just on a chasm's edge,

Where you will plunge, forever, ever falling,  
For infinite days and nights, a dark lump whirled  
That hears or thinks it hears an old voice calling  
Beyond the stars that cluster near this world—

A voice that follows you past endless night,  
Familiar, yet not quite half-known or named,  
The last and sorry remnant of delight  
That you lived for, pursued, and touched, and claimed,

Even as you touch the bolt that locks this gate,  
Smiling, with patience such as fits old men  
Who prophesy. Ah yes, what you create  
Perhaps you'll find,—but never come back again.

*Donald Davidson*



## Wind Free

**S**TRANGE memories linger in the human mind  
Of early life in forest, cave and tree;  
When I go out into a storm I find  
The elements are still a part of me.  
I long to hurl convention far away,  
To race and dance and gallop as I go,  
To fling my arms about and shout and play  
And follow where the wildest wind may blow.  
But I go soberly in rain or snow  
With hat upon my head and glove on hand;  
If you should pass me you would never know  
I was too wild for you to understand.

Yet once I must have been a wind-free thing  
As I am now sometimes when songs take wing.

*Marguerite Dixon Clark*

## Autumn

**T**HIS is the painted lady who delays  
With rouge and lipstick winter's coming days;  
Behind her scarlet smile she envies still  
The girl who wore pale rose and daffodil.

*Elizabeth Morrow*

## Poetry

I COULD not rid myself of rhythm, that day,  
The soft reiterations would not cease—  
And like a tree caught in a windy sway,  
I longed for some still vacuum of peace.

But heavily the steady stroke of things  
Pulsed in the tired marrow of my bones,  
And words beat down like powerful eagle wings,  
And hammers fell and fell on ancient stones.

That day I heard red drumming in the sun;  
The quiet throbbing of a grey dove's heart;  
That pause in which up-lifted waves count, one—  
Swing to the beach, sweep outward, and depart.

*May Lewis*

## Composition

"TO sleep: perchance to dream . . ." He turned his head  
And saw day's flare behind the heavy tower.  
"Ay there's the rub; for in that sleep"—he said,  
And stared into the river for an hour.

"The pangs of disprized love . . ." He frowned and shifted.  
Fog crept upon the unawakened town;  
Out on the muddy flow a dark swan drifted  
And far along the shore vague bells came down.

"The undiscovered country . . ." There he turned  
And heard a woman weeping in the street,  
And saw a window where a candle burned  
And caught the echo of departing feet.

"Thus conscience does make cowards . . ." Morning drew  
Pale silver to the marsh through willow stems.  
He scraped the edges of a muddy shoe  
And spat into the Thames.



## Lyric

SOME day, I've said a thousand times,  
I'll make a song as noble as a ship  
With gabriel blowing where the bowsprit climbs  
The sharp sea from his lip.

I'll make a poem like sea-lured birds  
Tiring around a lonely golden sail,  
With hope and weariness through all its words  
And measures like a gale.

To swing above the futile passion  
Of one sea-mountain murdering its brother  
I'll hang a bell to cry in desolation  
Clearer than any other.

You shall hear music keenly bitter  
With rhythms like a ship far out at sea  
Plunging upon the swell with wings that glitter  
And flag strung gallantly.

With radiant angel leaning far  
And bell hung high beneath the zenith's dome,  
With sail blown rigid as a scimitar  
Engarlanded with foam,

A luminous galleon shall rove,  
And few that pass it voyaging will guess  
It beaches in a godforsaken cove  
On tides of aimlessness.

*George O'Neil*

## Country Trees

COME with me!  
Great shadows call.  
I'll have my shade  
In long paths laid.  
The sun I'll give you for a present.  
I'll make the circle of his tracks—  
A black fox stalking a golden pheasant—  
And when his spread wings, hiding, fall  
Into the West as into straw,  
I'll overtake him like a paw.

## Admonishment To Dreams

THINGS sing in dreams; are dumb possessed.  
I dreamed my cold hands he caressed;  
The dream prowled through my heart. He came . . .  
He scarcely turned or spoke my name.

Don't let a dream prowl through your heart,  
A dream is a sneak-thief's counterpart,—  
Better a window-entering thug  
Stealthy upon your stairs, your rug.

Don't let a dream come in to hush  
A whimpering, for it will rush  
To the locked heart's jewelled shrine  
And steal the consecrated gems, the wine.

Don't let a dream impoverish  
The puny powers of a wish.  
Dreams don't give little life a chance  
To shine in its own radiance.

*Kathryn White Ryan*

## A Fellow and A Girl

FROM the big picture-show all marbly gold  
They walk into the public park. To-night  
The trees are black, the stars are mighty bright;  
And when in cute hoarse whispering he has told  
Her many dizzy things, she lets him hold  
His arm around her waist, and in the tight  
Shaky embrace she slowly moves, her sight  
Blurred, and her pulses hot, and her fingers cold.

There's something silly whining in their wrists.  
She looks at him, and he don't say a word.  
She knows how it is coming awful soon:  
And when she feels his fingers in her breasts  
She starts to cry. And like he hasn't heard  
He looks up at the ain't-it-pretty moon.

## The Humble Horse

WHO wouldn't ride as high as Bellerophon  
If he had such a splendid horse to ride?  
I cannot feign content, debate upon  
Matters of recklessness; I cannot hide  
My envy of that furious golden leap  
Dizzily into the sun: Through every even  
Step of my humble horse I hear the steep  
Hoof of Pegasus beating the clouds of heaven.

Bellerophon fell more swift than the rain sighing  
Over the flattened field where he sprawled dead.  
But marvellous, even that moment before dying—  
Ere the wild upward ecstasy could dim:  
The tumult of the wind about his head,  
The march of thunders driving under him.

*George H. Dillon*



## Sentence

**B**UT what you will forget, you should remember,  
And what you still remember, should forget.  
These are no dreams to dream in life's September,—  
A harvest time for those who sowed,—and yet  
You who would plant no seeds, but gave with grudging  
Some care to other's gardens in your youth,  
Lean here to moan and sigh at the unbudging  
Stone verdict of the years that spell out truth.  
Your subtle self you've saved from time's disaster,  
Unmerged with any ties that shape and bend  
Dependent souls who know earth for a master,  
And walk together to man's common end.

Now you shall stand erect, nor know the yielding  
You scorned in April; now you cannot yield.  
You who said only weakness wanted shielding,  
Carry before you an undented shield.  
For earth swings west to east, and all earth's passions  
Spent them like winds against your long denial.  
Run and amuse yourself with fads and fashions;  
Life will not grant appeal. Here ends your trial.

*Helen Ives Gilchrist*

## Lovers' Gold

**W**HAT shall be done to hold a shining thing  
Struck from hand touching hand, the shadow-slight  
Brushing of lips, or whispers in the night?  
Hard-mined this lovers' gold, swift-perishing.  
A song has sound remembering lips can sing,  
Dancing comes back with being done again,  
And chisel makes a form, and brush a stain  
For moods the soul gave moment's harboring.  
But this we cannot snare with sound or line.  
As bright as meeting stars, as dark and warm  
And vague as a heart's beat, its radiant storm  
Beats, and is stilled, and no new miracle  
Of lovers' peace or fire can make it shine  
From those dead midnights where it flamed and fell.

*Frank Ernest Hill*

## Inconsequential

WHETHER in cloudy triumph sprung  
From public lust of wind and hill,  
Or secretly devised among  
Deep lily-wombs where bees hang still;

Whether set forth on cosmic roads  
From mating comets, or subdued  
To little words that sting like goads  
The truces of two dreams at feud,—

One purpose moves without relief  
Through all the laws, and one event  
Times ever between stalk and leaf  
Its unpredictable descent.

Wherefore I smile that you should shrink  
From love, who are no less than I  
A puff of dark wind round a brink  
Of silence in a windy sky.

Small matter if such winds incline  
This way or that some fictile earth,  
Beating a brain to foam like wine,  
Or belly ripening into birth;

But smaller still that earth so used  
Turn on the end it cannot guess,  
Saying: "To serve you I refused  
This clod constrained to serve no less."

*William Foster Elliot.*

## Bear River

UP the quiet river come the fishing schooners,  
Daisies lie as white and close as pebbles on a shore,  
The finnan haddie dry in rows upon the hurdles  
There beneath the cherry trees by the kitchen door.

Step by step the oxen move browner than the sea-weed  
Dragging up a load of nets while the sun sinks to the west  
And the man who kisses a girl beside the hawthorne  
Has a curling mermaid in blue upon his breast.

*Elizabeth Coatsworth*

## Epilogue

CHILDREN of dust, astray among the suns,  
Children of the earth, adrift upon the night,  
Who have shaken the pageants of old gods and thrones,  
And know them crushed and dead and lost to sight,  
What is there in our darkness or our light  
To linger in prose or claim a singing breath  
Save the curt history of life isled in death?—

Life climbing blind through sunlight desolate  
Upon this saddest satellite of stars,  
Fearless and steadfast, holding toward the fate  
Of men and their little earth and sorrow-scars,  
When the broken ikons of fallen avatars,  
With grief and desire, long war and death and crime,  
Storm headlong roaring downward throughout time.

Standing erect, the sea-wind in our faces,  
We may look out across the whirl of spheres  
And falling flames that haunt cold interspaces  
Reverberating empty to our ears,  
Take our fresh gust of beauty out of the years,  
And go, unanswered, quit of questionings,  
To mix our dust with dust of slaves and kings.

*Maxwell Anderson*



# The Measure ❧ A Journal of Poetry

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## Elf-Man

IF you had ever heard him laugh his quick strange laugh; if you had ever watched him listening, his curly black head twisted a little sideways and up, one eyebrow twitched inquisitively, one eye tilted and glittering, mouth mobile, fluent, whimsically wistful; if you had ever seen him say some unexpected rapid thing, looking startled—much like a bird—the moment he had said it: if ever you had known all this in a nervous flash of delight, you would at once understand why de la Mare writes the sort of thing he, and he alone, can write.

For, in a degree uncanny and hitherto almost unapproached, Walter de la Mare possesses the faculty of total identification with the thing that excites and moves his fantasy. His imagination absorbs what it celebrates, coinciding at all points with the stone or mole or star or whatever the lyric instigator happens to be. It is Keats and the sparrow again; it is Shelley's "Be Thou Mel"

But this is not by any means to be confounded with the pantheistic habit of getting all mixed up with the landscape. There is no reek of the infinite about de la Mare. On the contrary, he perceives minutely and microscopically the finite agents, the physical panorama, his eyes darting like an insect's antennae, put-

ting the ghost print of indelible seizure on the thing. No poet, and for that matter no naturalist, has ever peeped and botanized and got down on his hands and knees in the dirt and fingered and sniffed and reveled in all the subterranean vibrations of existence as has he. And he sees everything for the first time since Adam kicked his adolescent heels at heaven; where he steps he leaves the earth instinct with local emphasis:

A couple of years ago Mr. J. C. Squire, in a brilliant review of "Memoirs of a Midget," noted this preoccupation with the diminutive. De la Mare's leviathans, he observed, "are few compared with his mice and snails and spiders, in a teeming world where every stone hides a community and every blossom has its secret and peculiar hieroglyphics." And because that astonishing Miss M. and her autobiographer are substantially one and the same person, the value of revelations like the following is immense:

"My eyes dazzled in colours. The smallest of the marvels of flowers and flies and beetles and pebbles, and the radiance that washed over them, would fill me with a mute, pent-up rapture almost unendurable." And elsewhere in this inverted "Gulliver," this Merciful Baedeker to the Folly Booth of the World, we read:

"Over such small things as a nut, a shell, a drop of rain-water in a buttercup, a pond of frost, . . . I would pore and pore, imbibing the lesson that the eye alone, if used in patience, will tell its owner far more about an object than it can merely see . . . ."

Here then is the elf-man who, though the shades of the prison-house intrude, has always been half-past three. Here is beauty remembered poignantly but precisely; a certain trembling, delicate, and snail-horn perception of beauty, multitudinous and exact and never construed for the sake of decoration or glossary; forever with the nostalgic terror and the mist of the passing of things upon it. Here is the heart-broken wisdom of Lear and the stabbing raillery of the Fool. And here, if you will, quite unobscured by any cloud of witnesses (the books on de la Mare multiply), is the eternal enigma and the old Road to Xanadu and one who rides a phantom charger noiselessly through a realm of chimaeras and one who remains as inexhaustible as the everlasting Alice herself.

*Joseph Auslander*

# *The Enchanted Mesa*

*The Enchanted Mesa and Other Poems*, by Glenn Ward Dresbach,  
New York, Henry Holt and Company.

Some years ago Glen Ward Dresbach went wandering out of the Middle West into the Southwest, and that was fortunate for those who loved the Southwest. For Mr. Dresbach began to put it into poetry—not the rough verses mixed of balladry, modern music jingle, and the realtor's vision, but the carved lines of poetry pointed at least toward eternity. His first volume, *In Colors of the West*, was a significant promise. Still the carving was rough and the dull stains the poet made of sandstone and cactus, willow and dull red river banks, were often muddy. It was an achievement, but it excited more than it satisfied.

*The Enchanted Mesa* represents a remarkable advance over the first volume. It does two things: it rounds out the picture of the Southwest Mr. Dresbach had begun, and it transcends the Southwest both in matter and in art. To my mind it marks the emergence of Dresbach as a definite figure in American poetry.

The title poem, which immortalizes an aspect of a land most Americans know very little, has a great many companions. And it is significant that when you remember these you cannot tell whether you are haunted most by the lyric insight of brief things like "A Cock Crows Near the Desert," remembering the persistent hushed questioning of one hearing an eerie call—

Through the thin airs of silver  
Tinted far off with dawn,

or by the objective reality of some of the short narratives, like "*The Box Canyon*," or by pieces that are almost sheer description, and drone their dull beauty into you only to startle sharply with something more than a picture when you had resigned yourself to a drowsy contemplation.

I suppose the trouble with most poets, nowadays as always, is that they know very little. So their work often becomes an effort painful both for themselves and their readers to achieve a musical



expression of the scant understanding of life into which they have grown. Perhaps Mr. Dresbach's distinction is that he really knows something, and seems to be on the road to knowing much more. He has comprehended a great landscape, and in his brief character studies and narratives he indicates comprehension of its people too. Then he understands the individual soul out of which the modern lyric springs.

He is not yet always sure about any of these things. It would be disappointing if he were. The range he has is too great to be taken easily by any poet at the beginning of his work. One of the most satisfying sensations I have, passing from the drowsy, narrative sing of "*The Better Ship*" to the delicate swift fluidity of his love lyrics to the ironic bite of—

We hear too much of victory  
That later on may only be  
Another case of hawk and hen  
And eagle happened on again.

is that of incompleteness. Many of the poems are fully matured, but others have a kind of an awkward complexity which, less by much than it was in Mr. Dresbach's first volume, seems bound to go with a release of power not yet fully realized or exercised. This is unusual in modern verse, where most poets are so wise about their limitations and, accepting them so enthusiastically, mint year after year their high-alloyed, unvaried gold.

*Frank Ernest Hill*

## Contributors

We have not deflected from the latitude of our hospitality, in evidence whereof we announce no less than eleven guests:

ELIZABETH SHAW MONTGOMERY of this city is the lovely and arousing author of *Scarlet Runner*.

ISABEL FISKE CONANT has just published *Frontier*, a second volume of delicate and strange precisions.

HAROLD RAYMOND ROSS hails from Sandusky, Ohio.

DONALD DAVIDSON finds time between teaching at Vanderbilt University and editing *The Fugitive* to produce one of the brilliant books of the poetic year in *The Outland Piper*.

MARGUERITE DIXON CLARK will soon publish her first book.

ELIZABETH MORROW will, we hope, be heard at greater length.

MAY LEWIS is a native New Yorker.

KATHRYN WHITE RYAN needs no introduction.

GEORGE H. DILLON is editor of *The Forge*, Chicago.

WILLIAM FOSTER ELLIOT is associate editor of *The Fresno Bee*.

ELIABETH COATSWORTH'S *Beyond Atlas* is comment enough.

With this issue we pass paste pot and shears to Louise Bogan.

# The Measure

*A Journal of Poetry*

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